ACTIVITIES USING LITERARY QUOTATIONS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The literary richness embedded in quotations has the potential to give students a fresh and creative angle which will inspire them to do better in studies and life. In this paper, I would like to discuss how the use of literary quotations in an EFL setting, can offer the student the benefits of both; language and literature. Tapping into their literary enhancing power not only builds students' aesthetic sense but also allows them to connect to themselves and others in a better and more effective way.

They also have the capacity to address many language areas like grammar, vocabulary, syntax, semantics, phonetics, culture and the four skills of communication. Acquiring competence in using and understanding quotations helps students in honing their speaking and writing skills.

KEYWORDS: Literary Quotations EFL Classroom Literary and Linguistic Competence

INTRODUCTION

A Classic is a Book that has Never Finished Saying What it has to Say

Italo Calvino

The literary richness embedded in quotations has the potential to give students a fresh and creative angle which will inspire them to do better in studies and life. Tapping into their literary enhancing power not only builds students' aesthetic sense but also allows them to connect to themselves and others in a better and more effective way. Quotations also promote the understanding of words and figurative language thus leading to an empowerment of their overall communication processes.

The sustainability of quotations in teaching schedules is their form and number. Their pithiness and brevity makes them easy to learn and the sound devices like repetition, rhyme, alliteration and assonance catch the attention of the students. They have the capacity to address many language areas like grammar, vocabulary, syntax, semantics, phonetics, culture and the four skills of communication. Acquiring competence in using and understanding quotations helps students in honing their speaking and writing skills.

DISCUSSIONS

Quotations are also capsules that might trigger off some significant responses which have the capacity to inspire, cajole, empathize, make one realize, appreciate, accept, reject and also a very important quality of gradually moving the reader onto another plane; a higher plane of looking at life in a more objective way to find solutions to bigger challenges. They could also inculcate a philosophical outlook towards life and everyday issues which in turn might help them face life in a better way. This is the power of words especially when they are placed in a literary environment. The terseness involved in this process has its own advantages. Though the students are not reading the entire literary piece, they are at

least being given a chance to peep through a window which would show them a better picture of life and something which also has a capacity to assist them in tangible and intangible ways. Through these nuggets of literary knowledge and wisdom, students will experience "How language can be used in different situations, for different purposes, and to varying effect." (Fenner: 2001)

Quotations can make the student think and educational research has been giving importance to thinking skills. One of the ways teachers can help students is to ask questions and to challenge ideas. Thinking skills define that process of the capacity of the human mind to understand, remember, form concepts, question, analyze, plan, reason, reject, imagine, seek solutions, judge, make decisions, empathize and so on. Zwicky's opinion regarding the importance of poetry is also relevant in the case of 'quotations'. He says "Poetry should have a central place in all of our lives, not only for the aesthetic pleasure it affords, but also for its ability to awaken our senses, connect us with ourselves and others, and lead us to think in synthesizing ways, as required by its use of the language of metaphor." (Zwicky: 2000) Receptivity to new ideas is an important aspect of personality development and a challenging or engaging thought in a quotation can surely make the student think. Just through a small tasks in the classroom, the student is being prepared to face the world and is likely to foster human values and respect human rights, thus displaying the pleasure and might of acceptance of the other. In a changing world of infinite challenges, quotations offer this platform, to prepare students to think critically and give strength to their future identities**.**

Quotations also assist the teacher in enhancing the teacher's awareness of the 'zone of proximal development' to understand students' individual differences to formulate questions**.** The Vygotskyan approach to educational psychology stresses on the role of social interaction and the role of learners in constructing knowledge and understanding. The role of the teachers in this context is also very significant in scaffolding students' learning. Donato explains the process of scaffolding thus: "In social interactions a knowledgeable participant can create, by means of speech, supportive conditions in which the novice can participate in, and can extend, current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence". (Cotterall: 158)

The idea of 'scaffolding' takes into consideration the social interaction among peers and the experienced or knowledgeable other. The learners then move from their existing performance to a better performance by taking support. This is the 'zone of proximal development' which the learner is placed in to gain potential knowledge through seeking help. The same approach may be applied in the present context of using literary quotations in the English classroom not only to enhance students' levels in communication skills but also improve their cognitive skills. The activities focus on interaction and engage the students in activities that make them talk, speak, think, reflect, write and express. At the same time it is for the teacher to observe carefully the proximal zones of students to pair or group them up.

One of the activities involving quotations could be to make the students understand the quotation and its nuances and then site some events / stories/ contemporary social issues and so on to apply the quotation. 'Understanding a quotation' also implies getting to know the power of words and their play in conveying images even in their economical form. The images show the learners how the uncommon can be linked to the common and ordinary or vice versa. These observations help them in broadening their mental horizons and also sensitize them to life as such to break the monotony of thinking or about it and this would be a valid transformation. They can also be motivated to showcase their creative talent by thinking of writing a story/ poem or any kind of creative writing. This activity can be taken up by involving them individually or in groups. The activity will hone their writing and speaking skills. The confidence that they gather in

working on quotations and applying the same to their speeches will immensely help them face interviews and later to take up professional discourses with renewed confidence and conviction.

In another activity in which students are grouped, quotations are used as discussion starters. They are sorted out according to the category they fit in like- life, politics, nature, human nature, music, creativity, God, science and so on. Then the categories are divided among the students and the groups come up with their discussions/ debates about the quotations. There is an exchange of knowledge among the students through participation and thus it becomes a meaningful engagement. They are also involved in cognitive development whose goals involve making inferences, making judgments, making connections and drawing conclusions with the help of higher thinking skills.

Students can also be encouraged to have a visual display of their selected quotations thus breathing life into the precious words. The change in the media of displaying the text which is 'quotations' in this context will help students receive the text 'differently' and use them when they construct texts of their own. Quotations can be given to students in terms of narrating or writing a story. The idea expressed in the quotation has to be embedded in the story. This can be done in small groups too.

Students can also be engaged in the act of discussing quotations or using them in another presentation of their own with the help of PPTs / photographs/ interesting pictures or even advertisement clips which might be relevant for the quotations they wish to present. This activity like the others improves their oral and written skills of communication. The quotations which are now the chosen text are analyzed and the students are guided through the strategies of writing to achieve cohesion and coherence. The brevity of the quotations helps the teacher in adjusting such sessions amidst the regular syllabus.

Activities through 'quotations' also stand up for creative freedom. They also give the students a chance to explore the unconventional zones and sometimes help them move from cliché's to creativity and a willingness to experiment for an 'out –of-the-box' thinking. It is important for the students to connect their responses to a given piece (a poem/ quotation) to their speech in small and large groups which will help them to express themselves better through these vocabulary boosters.

Practice through performing an activity which engages students through 'dumb-charades' is also interesting. Students can be divided into groups and can be given quotations to 'perform' using dramatics; an activity which will instantly engage students. At the end of the process they will be in possession of some quotations which they might remember better because of the kinesthetic activity involved.

Quotations can be given to students and they can be asked to prepare questions for a discussion. These questions are used to lead the discussion versus a teacher-led discussion. Comparisons in terms of differences in the level of student engagement, interest, participation and level of interpretation can be made by the teacher to offer the required scaffolding. Students can be drawn to different types of questions like open-ended versus closed, high- level versus low-level and so on.

'Think-aloud' activity can also be conducted with the help of quotations. This can be taken up with pairs or small groups to articulate responses. Students initially describe their thoughts. Then time is given to them to reflect upon their thoughts and crystallize them. Through this activity, the students can be made to understand the nuances and difficulties involved in the process of 'interpretation'. As they engage themselves through these activities they can also keep a journal to write down informally questions, reactions, responses and thoughts. This 'free - writing' process involves exploratory,

subjective and self-contradictory recordings. These in turn can be shared with a partner to trigger off further thinking. The teacher can throw light on the multiple perspectives some quotations can offer and the different ways of 'seeing' and help enhance their power of 'reading between the lines'. The process shows them the importance of both; imagination and ability to make connections with their existing knowledge and what they learn. Apart from self-introspection, it helps them build a strong value system that helps them live and let live.

'Internalizing' quotations may also draw the student towards reading books. Motivation to read books as they move along in their life, is also an alternative to the 'television culture' which is so pervasive and sometimes so shallow. Though, the globalized modern world has shown us the tremendous power of technology, it has also shown the darker side in terms ofviolence of the mind and the body. So in such cynical times, 'quotations' in the classroom and as part of the pedagogy carry their own little power of inspiration. Education is undergoing a paradigm shift and it can no longer be confined to the four walls of a classroom. Engaging students' minds with educational modes that help them and those around them have a significant role to play in today's world of development and chaos. Meaningful quotations are capable of making their contribution; smallbut at the same time effective in fuelling the passions of the students.

Bloom's Taxonomy has gained significance in educational research with its emphasis on the development of thinking skills and this has been widely used by teachers in planning their teaching. Bloom's Taxonomy has the following phases:

Cognitive goal→ Thinking cues

- Knowledge →Say what you know, or remember, describe, (knowing and remembering) repeat, define, identify, tell who, when, which, where, what

- Comprehension → Describe in your own words, tell how you feel (interpreting and understanding) about it, what it means, explain, compare, relate

- Application →How can you use it, where does it lead, apply (applying, making use of) what you know, use it to solve problems, demonstrate

- Analysis → What are the parts, the order, the reasons why, (taking apart, being critical) the causes/problems/solutions/consequences

- Synthesis → How might it be different, how else, what if, (connecting, being creative) suppose, put together, develop, improve, create your own

- Evaluation → How would you judge it, does it succeed, will it (judging and assessing) work, what would you prefer, why you think so

(Source: Bloom &Krathwohl 1956)

The same may be applied in this process of introducing students to literary quotations. The stimulus in this context is a set of quotations given to students. Afterdiscussing the stimulus, questions under Bloom's Taxonomy can be listed and given to the students in terms of knowledge, comprehension and application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Let us consider the following quotation- "To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all." ― Oscar Wilde. Looking at it from the point-of-view of Bloom's Taxonomy, a series of questions can be formulated.

- Knowledge--- *What does the subject matter in the quotation deal with?*

- Comprehension---*Why do you think the writer has expressed this/these ideas?*

- Application--- *What would be your response to the same subject?*

- Analysis------ *Which part of the quotation draws your attention and why?*

- Synthesis---- *Can you think of another idea on similar lines or contradicting the same?*

- Evaluation---- *How would you judge the opinion expressed in the quotation? Why?*

In this context of giving students '*just'* the quotations may also mean, not looking at the literary work from which it is taken. In the present process, quotations are being dealt with independently (with a focus on their message) and as pieces out of their actual context (or with just a briefing about it by the teacher). So when the above strategy is planned to be applied to this process, the teacher can frame questions from this perspective.

The questions are sure to kindle the thinking processes of students and result in a *cognitive exercise.* All around the world, students are being prepared for their futures and many a time an unpredictable one. In such a scenario, a wide range of competencies are expected from students which will help them assimilate information, evaluate its truth and make sound judgments. The focus is now on 'higher order thinking skills' in modern societies, on people who can judge, participate and generate new procedures in their work spheres with the help of such skills. From the teachers' point-of-view these little inclusions in an otherwise technical/ practical syllabus are sure to help in 'humanizing' the classroom and in training the students to bring in complexity and flexibility of thinking.

Regarding the content, there is no dearth of literary quotations for the teacher to choose and use accordingly. Some quotations listed below are those that I have found interesting and thought-provoking. They can set off an interesting debate, lead to challenge opinions and stretch the imagination of the reader. Some can also be analyzed for their syntactic and semantic value. They can also be looked at from the point of view of a stylistic analysis by the teacher to bring the students closer to the nuances of language to help them in communication. Thus they offer their flexibility to be exploited and explored by the teacher resulting in many activities.

"Have a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts."

Charles Dickens

"There are far far better things ahead than we leave behind"

C.S. Lewis

"If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the imagination is worth a thousand pictures

J .E. B. Spredemann

"Life is too important to be taken seriously."

Oscar Wilde

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Leo Tolstoy

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."

Charles Dickens

'It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.'

George Orwell

"All children, except one, grow up."

J.M. Barrie

In the end, it's not going to matter how many breaths you took, but how many moments took your breath away

ShingXiong

"In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on."

Robert Frost

"To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all."

Oscar Wilde

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle"

Albert Einstein

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."

Albert Einstein

"The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation"

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."

George Bernard Shaw

"The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom."

Isaac Asimov

"To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget."

Arundhati Roy

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end ...

William Shakespeare

CONCLUSIONS

The activities through the use of quotations in the classroom focus on learner-centeredness and this thought stimulating process can be used both for the elementary and advanced level EFL students. Thus the process not only builds communicative competence but also increases the power of the mind to think beyond the ordinary. Quotations represent human values and ways of understanding the world. So, making them a part of the teaching learning process is way of making students realize the importance of maintaining power, identity and cohesion. Though most of the quotations are part of literary fiction, they still tell the truth and it is this quality that lends itself to the personality development of students. At the same time the classroom offers enough space and scope to challenge ideas and critically examine the basic meanings implied in quotations. Though in a small way, quotations from literature do assist in adding a refreshing and a new dimension to a person's life and help him/ her become a fuller human being.

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